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A Measure of Grace

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Board But Not Bored!

by Nancy Hicks

I've been involved with WGA in one way or another for 22 years: donor, office manager, leadership team member, group member, group facilitator, speaker, and now a member of the board of directors. It is an honor to be part of this ministry in any way I can. Over the course of two decades any life will eventually have to wind its way through some pretty tangled jungles, and mine has been no different. My friends and mentors at WGA have most often been the ones to hand me the education and inspiration that have worked like a machete to help me hack through the confusion of tangled relationships. And they have offered themselves as traveling companions along the way so that I haven't had to walk alone. They are a gift to me of inestimable value. And I'm not the only one. I've watched hurting people limp in and sit in a lifeless little ball in the corner of WGA for weeks, months and in some cases, years. They sit and soak and show up again and

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sit and soak. I've come to believe that it is almost inevitable that if they keep soaking, they will show up one day with a small shoot of life poking up out of their protected hearts. Soon it grows a few leaves and before I know it, the miraculous wonder of the blooming plant, that God created in them before they left their mother's womb, is unfolding before the world. It reminds me of Galatians 6:9: "Do not grow weary in doing good, for in due time you will reap if you do not grow weary." It's not hard to want to work in the garden with the "lifeless little balls" that limp in once you've experienced this miracle of life and growth and healing.

Although this is my personal experience, I sit on a board with seven other people who attest to the same experience themselves. A few months ago, as we reviewed the daily function of WGA, we realized that things are running quite smoothly: groups are organized well, leadership is running like a top, speakers are lined up and effective. As a board, we too have been diligently focused on the immediate (primarily financial issues--like the rest of the world). And as we stepped back to reflect, we found ourselves excited to look up from our focus on maintenance issues and re-invest

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some energy in thinking about the future of the ministry. Where are we headed? What do we want to see happen for WGA? Being an entrepreneur at heart, I got really excited about all this talk of casting vision. For the next two meetings, Roger and Mary lead us through a brilliant series of brainstorming exercises. It was a holy work and God showed up. We were amazed as we talked and realized that we had united ideas about where we were and what we

wanted to help inspire. Here is a synopsis of what we discovered:

- WGA is the best kept secret around. We need to be more intentional about making ourselves visible so that it is easier for hurting or confused people to find us.
- We need to be partnering with local churches in more proactive ways.
- We need to have organized resources to

offer people who are too remote to get to us and to further support the work that they already do with WGA.

Here are a few things we are doing in immediate response to these findings: we are setting plans in place to update our website; put some of our oral tradition and teachings in writing; and find more opportunities to interact with churches by presenting

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Forgiveness: What is it?

By Mary Heathman

A well-known speaker lifts her head and shouts to the crowded auditorium, “**You do not have to forgive your perpetrator!**” The audience leaps to their feet as one, cheering and whistling their approval. I sit silently—feeling the weight of the deception.

Some version of this scenario repeats itself over and over again in seminars and workshops, support groups and counseling sessions with people who have been sexually abused. I understand why it is being said; I empathize with the underlying feelings; I even used to say and feel the same. Yet, I sit

From last article: “I remember the day I sat before God filled with anger, hot tears blurring the words I had just read, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14-15).

quietly praying in the midst of the noise, wondering what God thinks about all this, what he would do if he was physically here, what he would have me do.

What does forgiveness mean exactly? What is God asking us to do when he says to forgive one another, *to forgive our enemies*? If God is making such a point of it, wouldn't it be good to know exactly what it means?

According to scripture, forgiveness is something I am to do, and it is closely tied, as a prerequisite, to the forgiveness I need for my own sins. Merging various dictionary definitions into that understanding, I have formulated the following definition of the word “forgive”: *to forgive is to give up to God my resentment against people who have hurt me or someone I love*. In other words, if I take all my negative thoughts and feelings about a person who has sinned against me or others, pour them out to God and leave them there, refusing to take them up again, then I have forgiven that person.

An obvious problem comes up even

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What's the Scoop?

By Scott Kingry

S In a news report, whenever I hear the words, “disturbing new trend,” I heave a big sigh and think “Now what?” What follows just isn’t going to be good. As if cell phone “sexting” in school wasn’t outrageous enough, the latest craze is what’s known as “scooping,” and has been making the headlines within the last few months.

Various news reports and the *Urban Dictionary*, define it as “when male students reach around a girl’s shoulder, grabbing her breasts or reaching under her skirt to touch her private parts.” Yep, that is definitely disturbing. The controversy over this “fad” concerns the fact that allegations against “scooping” male students are considered “school boy pranks” by some schools and therefore dismissed. Hmm, Dictionary.com defines a *prank* as “a mischievous trick or practical joke.” It doesn’t seem to quite fit, does it?

In his book, *Don’t Call it Love*, Dr. Patrick Carnes would label



this conduct as **Intrusive Sex**—“when someone is sexualized or touched without their permission or in some cases, without their knowledge.” Subtler forms of **Intrusive Sexual** behavior include using sexually explicit stories or language, or inadvertently touching people in crowded public places, both of which may leave one feeling violated, but perhaps not knowing why. More obvious intrusions include making inappropriate sexual advances or gestures, sexual touching or fondling all the way up to rape.

That’s the tip of the iceberg really. The National Center for Victims of Crime (see link below) states: “Sexual assault takes many forms including attacks such as rape or attempted rape, as well as any un-

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wanted sexual contact or threats. Usually a sexual assault occurs when someone touches any part of another person's body in a sexual way, even through clothes, without that person's consent." So by this definition scooping is really a crime of sexual assault. How could it be interpreted by anyone as just a "shocking game"?

As always, without ever letting go of the reality of the violation, my mind tries to wrap itself around all the things that could contribute to such behavior. Is sexualized touch simply part of our culture? I remember when I was in my 20's living in the gay community, this kind of "groping" one another in the dance clubs was considered a rather normal way of teasing and being playful—even affirming on some occasions.

Of course, I also know there's probably a huge laundry list of terrible broken motivations—control, anger, contempt or past shame and abuse lurking in the background of any sort of groping. Yet, could there be legitimate needs and longings underlying such conduct? What are the good and holy things the enemy has distorted to this degree? Maybe there is the longing to be touched in our (U.S.) touch-deprived cul-

ture, or the longing for true intimacy in a quick fix, fast solution society?

The mixed motives and legitimate needs that lie beneath inappropriate behaviors leave us with a lot to separate, pull apart and ask for God's perspective on.

Perhaps this isn't such a "new disturbing trend." People have been sinning sexually since the fall. It's a good mental and prayerful exercise to look at the behavior of *anyone* who comes to WGA through all available lenses and to ask God what is really true about their situation. As we come to know and understand all we can about a person, we can pray and seek God's healing, forgiveness, repentance and recompense. Then grace can truly abound.

The National Center for Victims of Crime

<http://www.ncvc.org/ncvc/Main.aspx>

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in the reading of the definition. It is not enough to simply say, "I forgive you." Before forgiveness is complete—indeed, part of the process of forgiving—involves facing the extent of the damage, assessing the emotional, mental and spiritual costs. One must deal with the emotions that rise up and rail against the sense of injustice in letting anyone off the hook for the damage that has been done. Anger must be processed before it solidifies into resentment and bitterness. Emotional, mental and spiritual wounds must be brought into the presence of the Great Physician (and a few of his trusted followers) so that they may be cleansed and dressed carefully to facilitate healing.

This is what WGA survivors of abuse groups are designed to do, to provide an environment of grace and truth in which men and women may (sometimes for the first time) share what has happened to them. In support groups and discipleship sessions they come to an understanding of how they responded to what happened, and how they have developed destructive coping styles and behaviors which have further complicated their lives. And they experience

God's healing presence within the WGA community of leaders and a small group of others who walk together in their healing process.

In future articles I will address the questions: "So where does forgiveness fit into this healing process? What does that look like?" But for now I will wrap this article up with a few comments about what forgiveness is *not* and what it *is*.

***I know God
says to forgive;
I just don't
understand***

First I would like to say a bit about what forgiveness is NOT! Forgiveness is NOT *pretending that nothing happened*. Forgiveness is NOT *ignoring the consequences*. Forgiveness *does* NOT *have to result in restoring active relationship with the abuser*. Forgiveness is NOT *"letting the perpetrator off the hook."*

In fact, what forgiveness IS includes *facing the truth about what happened*. This involves *holding the abuser accountable* (even sometimes within the criminal justice system if the abuse was also a criminal offense.) Forgiveness *takes the weight of the abuser's sin from off your own back* and places it in the hands of an all-powerful God whose job it is to deal with

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sinner. Forgiveness IS *about stepping into freedom, stepping out from under the weight of another's sin* that has held you down.

As I read back over what I have written, I know that I have just touched the surface about what forgiveness is—please pray, study the word, and pray some more—God will continue to teach you about this. In the meantime, pray for me

as well, as I turn my attention in future articles to what the process of forgiveness looks like and how it plays out in one's relationships with self, God, and others. May the Lord Himself who is “able to do more than we could ask or imagine” be our guide as we think about forgiveness; may His spirit be our most present and influential Teacher.

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the ministry of WGA, preaching and offering to pilot Sunday School classes.

And now, here's where you come in!

- Would you be willing to facilitate WGA making a presentation to your worship community?
- Would you be willing to explore the possibility of a 6 or 8 week Sunday School class led by a WGA ambassador for the people you worship with?
- Have you ever considered attending WGA? We have a 12 week “foundation” series that offers a basic shed of tools for every person who plans to have relationships with other human beings. (It really is that broad in scope!) Is God stirring you, pressing you, wooing you to explore WGA? We believe after spending time talking and praying about this that God is indeed drawing more people to be involved with us. If you don't have any idea why you

might be involved or how you might fit in, don't worry about it. Just show up!

In a fast-paced age of increasingly distant and shallow relationships, WGA offers authentic, face-to-face community—a place to soak in grace and truth and love. God longs to nurture all of us and reveal the blooming beauty He planted deep within each of us from the moment He conceived us in His mind. We are just one of the places that He is doing that. Spread the good news!





June

At a Glance

June 5th: Family and Friends Gathering

June 12th: Men's event: Coors Field tour

June 13: Leadership meeting

June 26th: Roger and Jill's wedding!

Thursday Night Group

June 6th: 36 People

June 10th: 28 People

June 17th: 42 People

June 24th: 43 People

Orientation meeting: 4 new people

July

And Beyond

July 17th: Men's softball clinic

July 29th: Open Meeting

August 7th: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 8:00-9:00 am

October 15th—17th: Leadership Retreat

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A Measure of Grace
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Where Grace Abounds
exists to guide and support
men and women who seek to
understand sexuality and
relationship, and to inspire
all people to know and
personally appropriate
God's plan for their
sexuality and relationships.

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